

April 10, 2011

Living Out The Gospel In Real Life

Authentic Worship

John 4:15 – 26

Last week we saw that this story of Jesus and the woman of Samaria highlights the fact that as created human beings we have an insatiable thirst that all the water, that is, all the things, in this world will never quench. This woman's condition is our condition, her thirst is our thirst, her attempts to satisfy her thirst with men means that she has to keep going to that well, never getting that thirst quenched. The things of this life do not have the capacity to quench our soul thirst, whether it's relationships, money, power, fame, or all the temporary things that we run after. We thirst for meaning, for significance, for love, for acceptance and it is a craving in our souls that cannot be satisfied with anything of this world. And if we keep putting down the bucket of our soul in the well of things, not only will our thirst not be satisfied, but it will actually increase.

And then Jesus makes her the offer of another kind of water – living water – that alone has the qualities that will satisfy the thirsty soul. **'You are drinking from the well of this world and that water will only make you thirstier – I have water that will satisfy!'** It is water that brings eternal life. It is water of heaven – not of earth. His offer is another life. The best that you can do with this well water is to keep feeding the flames of desire that cannot be quenched. But the water that Christ is offering you will satisfy all your desires. And then Jesus says that the answer is to put down the bucket of your soul into the well of living water – a new spring. Our problem is not so much that we have wants and needs and desires. It is that we try to fill those wants and needs and desires with water that will not quench the thirst. And so **if you find yourself with a thirst that nothing in this world can satisfy, you've been drinking from the wrong well.** And Jesus tells us to come to Him and drink of living water. Come to Christ who is the fountain of life and drink and be satisfied.

And then we read in verse 15: *The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw."* John 4:15 What Jesus has done is awaken her to the reality of her condition – thirsty. She had been going through a succession of men trying to quench that thirst, trying to find meaning and significance and love even, and didn't realize the nature of that insatiable thirst. But she still doesn't understand the nature of her thirst. In fact she still thinks Jesus is talking about water, the stuff she had come to get. And you would think at this point Jesus would begin telling her how to have this living water.

But He doesn't do that. What He does instead looks like He's changing the subject: *He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here."* John 4:16 But He's not changing the subject. Notice she says, 'Give me this water' and then He says, 'Go, call your husband'. What Jesus is saying is that she has been drinking from the well of multiple, unsatisfying relationships, and until she realizes the problem, there can be no change. *The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly."* John 4:17-18 The observation was that she was suffering from an insatiable thirst. The offer was living water that would quench it, and the answer was a new spring, that would not only quench the thirst, but well up continually to keep on quenching it.

But there was something in the way – sin. We all know that sin is doing, saying, thinking, anything contrary to the law of God and she had certainly sinned. She'd been through five husbands and finally decided that marriage was no thirst-quencher, so perhaps just living with a guy would do it. But there is more to it than that. Sin is not just breaking God's law – the real issue with sin is a heart issue, **because sin is putting a higher value on anything than God. Sin is worshipping everything else but God.** And I believe Jesus' intent here is to lead this woman in worship. Ten times in this short conversation, the word worship occurs, and I think this passage tells us **what** worship is, **why** we ought to worship and **how** we should worship. Remember Jesus is speaking to this woman's issue of insatiable thirst, and in doing so, highlighting the condition of every man or woman. We thirst – and we can't satisfy it – what will satisfy our thirst? And when Jesus says living water will do it, and the woman asks for this water, the whole conversation turns to worship. And so this morning I want to look at the what of worship, what is authentic worship; the how of worship – that is how must we worship; and finally the why of worship – what is it about worship that quenches our thirst for the things of this world and fills us with springs of living water. **What is worship, how should we worship and why must we worship.**

So what is worship? The word used here and most other places in the New Testament for worship is **proskuneo**; and it means to ascribe great worth or value to someone or something superior. The literal translation means '**to kiss the hand**', which was a very common custom in the middle east when you were presented to a king or high official. You kissed his hand – you worshipped. Our word worship comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word **weorthscipe**, which has come down to us as **worth – ship**. To worship is simply to ascribe worth to the object of worship. When we talk about worship in the context of Christianity, we often talk about a 'worship service' and in that worship service we usually focus on the music. But worship is more than a service and more than music. Worship, to worship God goes far deeper than two hours on a Sunday.

What is worship? We do it all the time without thinking about it. Let me describe it like this. Suppose your great Aunt Hilda died and left you a beautiful antique piece of jewelry, and you said 'That's very nice' secretly thinking, 'That's not going to go with anything I am ever going to wear' and you throw it in your drawer and forget about it. But then one day, your friend, who happens to be a jeweler comes to visit and in the course of things you show him this weird antique piece of jewelry Aunt Hilda left you. And he comes unglued. He goes bananas. He says, 'Do you have any idea of what you have here? This is incredible! This is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars just like it is! Only two of these pieces were ever made and no one knows where the other one is. You are holding a fortune in your hands'. And then he goes on to point out all the awe-inspiring aspects of this particular piece of jewelry and you begin to appreciate its worth and beauty in a whole new way.

What happens to your attitude about that piece of jewelry now? It changes. Somethings different. You are looking at this thing with much different eyes. What has this guy just done? He has just led you in worship. He has shown you the real value of what you hold in your hand. **He has stimulated emotions of awe, that lead to joy, that lead to a change in behavior, and ultimately cause you to invest everything in this.** You are not putting that piece back in your dresser drawer tonight. You are looking for a safe to put it in, or perhaps a safety deposit box. Your whole world has changed. You begin thinking through the implications of this thing. And then he says, 'You have to get this cleaned and repaired and it is going to cost you a couple of thousand to do it. But if you do, it will double the value'. What are you going to say? You are not even going to quibble because the investment is so miniscule in light of the worth of the object. And you begin to invest in it. That is worship.

Or suppose you inherited a piece of property and then had an appraisal done on it and it came back with a value that was much higher than you thought it was worth. Instead of being worth \$100,000, it was worth nearly \$1,000,000 And not only that, the appraiser tells you that with an investment of \$10,000 you can double the value of the property before you sell it. What do you do? You scrape together the \$10,000 however you can! What is \$10,000 in light of 2 million? It's nothing! On the other hand if someone told you that your car needed \$10,000 worth of work you'd probably not even consider it. Why? The return on the investment would be upside down. You'd spend far more than you would ever realize from the car. But the property is different – it's valuable and you begin to worship that property. That is, you begin thinking through the implications of what selling it would mean for you and your family – how it would change everything in your life. And you begin to appreciate and value that property. And then you begin to invest in it and everything in your life begins to revolve around it. What is worship? **Worship, authentic worship is giving God not just high value, but ultimate value, and investing everything you have in Him.** That is worship.

If you look at the testimony of those who knew this kind of worship, you begin to realize that authentic worship changes you – it transforms you. Isaiah comes into the temple and is struck by a vision of the greatness of God. It says he '*...saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.*' Isaah 6:1 and it transformed his life. He saw God. He saw the transcendent value of the One seated on the throne, and whatever he could give in return was nothing compared to Him. And then the Lord tells him that he needs someone to do a job and the job is to go give a message to some people, which by the way, none of whom will ever listen to you. And Isaiah says, 'I'll go – I'm your man!' Why would he volunteer for a job in which he would have no audience, no success, no fame or acclaim? Isaiah jumped at the chance because when he saw the infinite worth of God, the sheer majesty and glory of God, it so outweighed any investment he could give that it would have been stupid not to go. When we in worship see the glory and goodness and majesty of God, it transforms us utterly. We are suddenly willing to invest whatever we are, whatever we have – to risk it all for the One who has infinite worth.

In January of this year, Pakistan's minister of minorities, Shabaz Bhatti, attended the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington D.C. where he met and talked with some of the top leaders in this country. On March 2, just over a month ago, he was killed by four Taliban gunmen who riddled his car with automatic weapons as he drove away from his mother's home in Islamabad. Just a few months before he was killed, he had given a video interview with a journalist who was trying to find out what made this guy tick. Bhatti was an outspoken Christian in the middle of an increasingly hostile, militant Muslim nation and his stance as a Christian had brought death threats against him from the Taliban. But in the interview Bhatti said, *'These Taliban threaten me, but I want to share that I believe in Jesus Christ who has given His own life for us. I know what is the meaning of the cross, and I am following the cross. And I'm ready to die for a cause.'* What gave Bhatti that kind of courage? I would submit that this man worshipped – really worshipped. He knew that the investment of his life in the cause of Christ was something relatively small in light of the reality of Christ and the glory of God.

If someone came up to you and said, 'Do you want to buy this box of Tic-Tacs'? And you say, 'Sure, how much'? And they say, 'Twenty bucks.' You would probably look at them like they were crazy. Twenty bucks for a box of Tic-Tacs? The investment definitely is not worth the return. But suppose someone came up to you and said, 'I'd like to sell you this Mercedes-Benz GL Class – loaded with extras'. And again you say, 'Alright, how much'? And they say, 'Twenty bucks'. You are not going to have to think long and hard about it. You are not thinking about how many Tic-Tacs you can buy with twenty bucks at that point. ***The ease with which you part with twenty bucks has altogether to do with the worth of the object at hand.*** Is it a box of Tic-Tacs? Or is it a Mercedes?

What was it that caused Isaiah to jump at the opportunity to invest in a career that was an utter failure? What was it that caused Shabaz Bhatti to follow Jesus to the cross and die in a bloody crossfire? What is it that has motivated Christians throughout the centuries to invest it all, to spare no expense as it were, to follow Christ? Look at all those who were willing, joyfully willing to lose their reputation, lose their security, lose their jobs, lose their lives for the sake of Christ. Read through chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews. Read about the heroes of the faith who invested everything in a life of faith because they saw the surpassing value of Christ. Look at Moses: *By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt ; for he was looking to the reward.* Hebrews 11:24-26 If he consider the reproach of Christ of greater value than all the riches of Egypt, imagine what His glory is worth. ***Moses worshipped. Worship. Authentic worship.***

Let's go back to the woman at the well. Jesus exposes the sin in her life – He exposes the worthlessness of the relationships she has been investing in, time and time again. And in effect says to her, 'You've been worshipping at the wrong altar.' He begins to talk about spiritual things and the woman picks up on it: *The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."* John 4:19-20 And *Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.* John 4:22

In other words, authentic worship is not about this mountain or that, this religious system or that religious system. If you want to know the truth, Jesus says, you Samaritans are worshipping ignorantly – you are assigning ultimate value to things that cannot save you. The Jews at least know from whom salvation comes. But you are all wrong. It doesn't come from this mountain or that mountain. You see the Samaritans were worshipping things that ultimately could not save them, and the Jews were worshipping the temple and the law and the prophets and ceremonies. They were like your children at Christmas who unwrap the toys and proceed to play with the box. They were giving things ultimate value and investing in rites, rituals and ceremonies and Jesus is saying that there is a whole dynamic of worship that they are missing.

And they are missing the whole *idea* of worship, Jesus says that God ***demand***s a certain kind of worship. Here He answers the how question: ***How should we worship? "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.*** John 4:23 The how of worship is that ***we must worship in spirit and truth.*** To worship in spirit is to worship God with the core of who we are. It springs from deep and thoughtful meditations of our heart as opposed to mere formality and ceremonialism. It is living water bubbling over in joy toward God. C.S. Lewis describes it like this: *'...we must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God – drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by, that delight which...flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression, our joy no more separable from the praise in which it liberates and utters itself than the brightness a mirror receives is separable from the brightness it sheds.* C.S.Lewis

"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:24 And to worship Him in truth is to worship God as He is revealed in His word. All our ideas about God, all our suppositions about His kingdom and rule and worth, must come under the rule of Scripture – truth. The truth is, God is the only one worthy of our worship. He alone inspires ultimate awe and wonder praise and adoration. He alone is worth giving up all the things that we so ignorantly treasure in view of the surpassing value of knowing Him. One of my little granddaughters has a ragged little bunny she treasures, called Sophia. For her, Sophia is comfort and security, and it would be difficult for her to go to sleep without Sophia there to cuddle with. And I would bet that if you asked her to trade Sophia for that GL class Mercedes, at the very best she would hesitate. And you say, 'Come on, she's just a child – she doesn't know any better'. And I would agree, she's just a child. She doesn't have any idea of the value of such an offer. But don't we look like that in God's eyes? Here we are, holding on to our bunnies when infinite joy is offered. But we don't understand that until we begin to see the truth of who God is.

Finally, Jesus says that the Father is pushing us to worship, seeking, even demanding worship. *for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers.* John 4:23 **This is the why of worship.** The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind. It is a commandment – not a suggestion. God is saying, 'Worship Me'. Does it sound strange to you that God demands our worship? Isn't that unworthy of Him? Not at all. **He is the ultimate reality in the universe.** It is He that has made us, not we Him. What or whom should we worship if not Him? If mere, temporary, transient things like jewels and real estate engage our hearts to worship – how much more should the infinite, priceless One of the universe not only engage our hearts to worship but demand it from us? How much more awe, how much more joy, how much bigger the implications of God in our life would there be, how much more investment of our time and money and energy would we spend to get this ultimate treasure? No sacrifice would seem too much – no trial would seem too hard – no circumstance would seem too difficult – if our worship were centered in God.

The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." John 4:25-26 At this point, the woman drops her water bucket and runs into the city and immediately begins telling people about this man. I believe she got it. Jesus had led her into worship and I think she suddenly saw who He really was. That inspired awe, and joy that led to a change in behavior that ultimately led to her investing everything in this One, and she immediately had to tell somebody. **The overflow of authentic worship will always result in missions.**

I don't know if any of you have ever read how the gospel came to Korea, but I want to end with a little story about that. Korea had been a closed country for centuries, either killing or deporting anyone unfortunate to land on their shores that was not Korean. But in 1866, a group of adventurers decided to open that country up by taking their ship, the General Sherman up the Taedong River to Pyongyang. At the last minute, a young man got on the ship, actually he had to almost fight his way on to it and sailed with them. That young man was a Welsh missionary to China, Robert J. Thomas. Ever since Thomas had learned that educated Koreans could read Chinese, he developed a passion to bring them the Word of God in the form of Chinese Bibles. And so he forced his way onto the ship with a box of Bibles.

At Pyongyang, the Korean officials ordered the American boat to leave at once but the Americans defied the warning. In response the Koreans lined the banks of the river and fired on the ship. Of course they didn't really hurt anything because all they had were these ancient flintlock rifles. But after two weeks of this the Americans couldn't land and decided to try it another time. But as they turned to go back down the river, they got stranded on a sand bar in the middle of the river. By this time the Koreans were really tired of these guys and sent fireboats down the river and eventually caught the General Sherman on fire and the Americans had to abandon ship. Everybody got off with as many weapons as they could find and tried to storm the banks of the river, guns blazing. Not surprisingly, no one survived. But there was one guy who stood out to the Koreans. He came ashore, not with guns, but with an armload of books – not shooting but throwing books at people, shouting 'Jesus, Jesus' and at one point, shoving these books into the hands of those who were trying to kill him. Eventually he was clubbed and stabbed to death, along with everyone else.

But 30 years later when Korea was finally opened to foreigners, a Presbyterian missionary named Sam Moffit came to preach the gospel. And in one of his very first classes for new converts, a Korean man came up to him holding a Chinese Bible. His father had picked it up on a very bloody beach 30 years earlier. And we also learned the story of another man who had been one of the ones who clubbed and stabbed Robert Thomas to death. Haunted by the memory of the man he had killed, convinced by Thomas' face that seemed to radiate light, (he described it as 'beaming'), convinced that he had killed an innocent man, this guy took one of the Bibles from that massacre and wallpapered his house with its pages. People came from all over to read his walls and eventually a church grew up there and one of this man's nephews became a pastor.

Authentic worship. It will change you. Authentic worship will quench our thirst for the things of this world and fill us with springs of living water. Authentic worship in spirit and truth will open our eyes to the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord and spill out in ceaseless praise and thanksgiving to the end that we become instruments of His grace to the world around us.

Our gracious and loving heavenly Father,

You have loved us everlastingly, unchangeably, extravagantly, grant us to love You as we are loved. You gave Yourself for us, may we give ourselves unreservedly for You. You died for us, may we live for You in every moment of our time, in every consideration of our minds, in every beat of our hearts, in every act and every word. Grant us to have done with the deadly delights of sin and the passing pleasures of this life in view of the surpassing value of knowing You, loving You, worshipping You above everything. Forbid it Lord that we would fill our buckets with water that does not satisfy but let us instead be drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by, that delight which...flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression so that we would spread His joy through the gospel to all people, we pray in the precious, life-giving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.